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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [IZ](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKS TAKE STEPS TO ADDRESS TRUCKER SECURITY IN  
IRAQ; WAITING ON U.S. RESPONSE

REF: A. ANKARA 4529

[B](#). ANKARA 4600

[C](#). ANKARA 4893

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In addition to their request for U.S. assistance (ref a), Turkish officials -- recognizing that USG resources for trucker security are limited and that the USG cannot solve the problem -- have been exploring a number of ideas Turkey could implement on its own to improve the security of Turkish truck drivers in Iraq. An interim U.S. reply addressing some of the security suggestions made by the Turks would help them manage what they recognize is a difficult issue that will only be resolved in the long term. End Summary.

#### Turkish Actions to Reduce Truckers' Risk

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[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 8, MFA DDG for Bilateral Economic Affairs Sakir Fakili asked Econoffs about a U.S. response to the list of ideas that were passed in a non-paper to DCM on August 11 (ref a). Fakili was grateful that one of the Turkish suggestions had already been accomplished: Embassy Baghdad had designated a point of contact on trucker security and had already made contact with the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad. On the other items, Fakili said extending escort operations to all Turkish convoys -- not just those supplying U.S. forces -- would be the ideal solution from the MFA's point of view. Nevertheless, he recognized that the U.S. military might not be in a position to do all that Turkey had suggested.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Fakili stated that Turkey recognizes that the Turkish drivers make an important contribution to the stability and reconstruction of Iraq; and Turkey benefits as well. According to Fakili, at any given time there are about 5-6,000 Turks in Iraq. Turkish companies have been awarded contracts totaling USD 500 million, and Turkish exports to Iraq have grown dramatically, more than doubling to USD 1 billion in the first half of 2004. On a macro level, this trade has not been significantly impacted by the violence against Turks that stepped up in August.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Fakili said the government is working closely with Turkish trucker associations and businesses to identify steps Turkey can undertake on its own to improve security for Turkish truckers: some Turkish companies are interested in a plan to build secure rest stops for trucks inside Iraq, and Turkey is looking into using contractors to enhance security for truck convoys. Because Iraq will allow only Iraqi security firms, Turkish officials have been talking with some firms in Kirkuk about providing security teams for the truckers. He added that security was also one of the main topics discussed when Jalal Talabani and Nechirvan Barzani visited Turkey this week.

#### Border Backlog Lower -- Turkey to Use Syria Route

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[1](#)5. (SBU) Fakili mentioned that the backlog of trucks from Iraq to Turkey at the Habur Gate border crossing seems to have eased recently. He said Turkey has already made a number of improvements to increase the capacity of the border crossing, including increasing the number of personnel and installing computers to automate record checks. However, he admitted that Habur will continue to be a problem. Building a second border crossing would solve the problem, he offered, but efforts to agree with the Iraqi side failed. As a result, Turkey was looking into using the 55 km-long road and rail corridor that runs through the extreme north-east corner of Syria. Currently, 6 trains a week are transiting Syria. (Note: TPIC, the export arm of the state oil company TPAO, began making fuel deliveries by train via Syria in January [1](#)2004. We are not aware if Turkish truckers have been using the road through Syria.) Fakili asked if the U.S. would have any concern about Turkish truckers using the route through Syria from the Nusaybin border crossing. (On September 9, Transportation Minister Yildirim announced that Turkey and Syria had announced an agreement to allow Turkish drivers to transit Syria to Iraq.)

Comment

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16. (SBU) Trucker security remains an important issue for the GOT. As Turkish citizens continue to be attacked and sometimes killed, the GOT recognizes that inaction on this issue could lead to a political backlash against the government's support for U.S. efforts and could lead to truckers deciding that the risks they run to provide vital supplies to the Iraqi economy and U.S. forces are no longer worth it. Fakili and other MFA officials with whom we have recently met recognize that there are no easy answers and that Turkey will have to work with the government of Iraq to find solutions over the long term. At the same time, the government needs to be able to show its public that it is taking action to protect its citizens. Thus the MFA continues to look for a U.S. response to the list of ideas in the non-paper to help improve security for Turkish drivers. It is also encouraging that the government is taking action on its own to reduce some of the risks.

17. (SBU) Action Request: We understand the difficulties that implementing the Turkish ideas may entail. However, we urge Washington to prepare an interim response to show that we recognize the importance of this issue and to give Turkish officials something to point to that the USG takes this issue seriously and is working with Turkey to help. We offer the following recommendations for elements of an interim response:

- A response on convoy security will take more time.
- We are ready to offer logistical and security assistance for Turkish teams who want to travel to Iraq to examine possible locations for building secure warehouse and rest centers for truckers.
- We are ready to brief Turkish officials on the communication options in northern Iraq. For example, to what extent is cell phone service available in the area. What are plans for improvements. Also, we recommend exploring options such as establishing an information center at the border with current information on the weather, security conditions, etc., or providing regular (monthly) briefings from a U.S. official.
- Embassies Baghdad and Ankara have established POCs for Turkish officials on trucker security.
- We are ready to help identify U.S. contractors to share their experiences in Iraq dealing with insurance issues.

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